



# The Ames Intelligencer

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## 51 Students Die as Influenza Epidemic Sweeps Campus



*State Gymnasium was converted into a hospital to accomodate the surge of influenza cases during the 1918-19 epidemic. Fifty-one deaths occurred in a student population of approximately 3,000.*  
*Photo, ISU Special Collection*

By Farwell T. Brown

The influenza epidemic of the winter of 1918-19 traveled across the nation, east to west, with Army training establishments the hardest hit. That fall about one-half the student body on the Iowa State College campus was made up of Student Army Training Corps recruits (S.A.T.C.). Ames experienced the full impact of that epidemic that cost the nation more lives than did World War I.

It was called "Spanish Flu" and spread world-wide as a result of the mass movement of Army personnel. We simply had never developed any degree of immunity to it.

It was a time of fear because of how the flu was transmitted and methods of treatment were then unknown. It was a time of shock as there were two casualty lists almost daily - the war dead and flu deaths. It was spoken of as a plague - fear and rumor thrived. In Ames within a seven-week period in October and

November of 1918 there were 51 deaths on the Iowa State campus. During the same period, there were 18 deaths reported in the town and nearly as many reports of deaths of Ames soldiers elsewhere in military service.

It was a time of emergency. In response to orders issued by the U.S. Dept. of Health, the Ames City Council took action. Mayor Graves and Ames Health Officer, Dr. Earl Rice issued an order on Oct. 9, 1918

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May, 1986

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closing the public schools. Theaters, churches, and places of amusement were included in the proclamation. "You are hereby notified that Spanish or Epidemic Influenza must be reported to the mayor and to the Secretary of the State Board of Health," the order continued. By October 15th all Story County schools had been closed.

Dr. Charles Tilden, college physician, organized his staff, local Ames doctors and nurses, in caring for the large number of hospitalized cases on campus. Out of about 3,000 students enrolled, 1,250 were reported hospitalized at one time. The new College Hospital was taxed beyond capacity. State Gymnasium was converted into a hospital with the entire main floor lined with rows of hospital beds. The nearby Collegiate Presbyterian Church basement also became a hospital for influenza patients. Portions of dormitories became isolation wards.

The Brooks house, owned then by the Masonic Lodge and located on the corner of Kellogg and Fifth Street downtown, was put into use to care for overflow patients from Mary Greeley. Former nurses living in the community returned to active duty and five nurses came from Webster City to help out at the Mary Greeley Hospital.

General James Rush Lincoln, prof. of Military Tactics, and commanding officer of the S.A.T.C. unit, issued quarantine orders and Iowa State students and faculty were required to obtain passes to leave or to return to the campus. The possible occurrence of other disease outbreaks on campus resulted in an order, dated October 29, 1918, making all Ames business places 'off limits' to S.A.T.C. students unless proprietors and their clerks were first vaccinated against smallpox and immunized against typhoid. Mass vaccination and im-

munization of students was begun. "We could not handle an outbreak of a second epidemic," General Lincoln responded to complaining business people.

With Ames children generally confined to their home neighborhoods, two Ames teachers, Kate Lysinger and Della Moberly, took it upon themselves to meet every passenger train arriving at the Ames Depot. They sought out parents arriving in response to the report of the serious condition or death of their sons on campus. The Ames Weekly Tribune of Oct. 21, 1918 reported, "They have piloted fathers and mothers from the passenger station to the morgue as well as to the places where the sons were lying sick." (Kate Mitchell School today bears the name of Kate Lysinger Mitchell).

With so little knowledge of the disease in those days, the element of fear was significant. One day the hearse used to convey bodies from the College Hospital broke down and the horse-drawn wagon used to take the mail from the depot to the post office was pressed into use. The sight of that wagon going down Lincoln Way with five or six body boxes on it gave rise to the rumor that the mail might become infected. A front-page story in the paper of Oct. 16th spiked that rumor and reported that "the matter has been reviewed by the Board of Health and

conditions are found to be the best possible and no alarm should be felt."

It is said that telephone operators often wore masks at the switchboards, not knowing how the disease might be transmitted. The telephone company locally requested patrons not to call operators to inquire the time of day. Their load of emergency calls made that service difficult. The city postponed all house-to-house meter readings during the epidemic.

Ames schools were reopened on Nov. 25th, but an influx of new S.A.T.C. student recruits was accompanied by an alarming increase in cases. Schools were again closed on Dec. 7th. Finally, they were allowed to open for good on Dec. 20, 1918. The epidemic subsided and finished its course in the spring of 1919.

By mid-November 1918 the Spanish Flu Epidemic had claimed 86,045 lives in the U.S. (Incomplete Reports U.S. Dept. of Health). In Iowa, there were 6,543 deaths. Probably more than 90 deaths occurred that involved the Ames' community, including the members of Ames families who were in the service. Two prominent Ames businessmen had died suddenly. C. L. Siverly, president of the Union National Bank, died on Nov. 6th and George Cole, local telephone company manager, died on November 9th.

Students Army Training Corps,  
Iowa State A & M College,  
U. S. Army, Ames, Iowa.  
.....October 10.....1918  
.....Catherine L. Cole.....has pass  
From..Oct..10....1918 to Further notice. 1918  
By order of.....General Lincoln.....  
.....  
.....Capt. 50th Inf., Adj. ....

Passes were required at Iowa State College entrances during the influenza epidemic of 1918. This one issued to Catherine Cole survives.



# Tragedy Mars 1919 Air Show

By Farwell T. Brown

The first airplane to be seen in Ames was the one that landed in the oat field at the corner of Thirteenth and Duff in the Summer of 1915. But it was in late July of 1919 that the first plane to be locally owned was reported. It was a Canadian Curtiss plane purchased in Chicago by the Minert Auto Co. jointly with Walter Harriman, a veteran World War I flyer of Ames. Stunt exhibitions and passenger flights were advertised at once, and the town was prepared to see flying services come to the area. A full schedule of passenger flights was announced for the week-end of August 3.

It was a week-end destined to end in tragedy. Today a resident of Story City, a woman in her seventies, tearfully recalls that Sunday afternoon of August 3, 1919 and the accident that left her painfully injured and cost the life of her young cousin.

Harriman, who had attained the rank of lieutenant in the aviation corps, completed his flight training at San Diego, California, and was well known in Ames. Flights took place at the J. E. Arnold field, today the site of the Hach Chemical Plant.

Flights were made on Friday and Saturday; but Sunday afternoon of August 3 proved to be the big day. It had rained the night before; the field seemed to have dried sufficiently, however. Cars lined both Lincoln Way along the south side of the field and along what is now Dayton Road that bordered the west side. People were on hand from around the County to see the plane, and some to take their first plane ride!

Ames Police Chief F. W. Willey's turn to ride came. His was successful, as all had been. The field had become muddier as the plane's gear broke through the stubble that remained after the field had been mowed short for its use as a flying field; but Harriman had experienced



*Clarice Flattebo in her Story City home recalls tragic events of 1919 air mishap.*

no difficulty up to that point. The next passenger to ride was Bill Cure, then a patrolman on the Ames force and later Ames police chief for many years. As Harriman was readying to take off, heading his plane westerly along the muddied runway, several hundred onlookers lined both sides of that runway. Two little girls eagerly were climbing the fence at the west end of the field.

Some thought that it was because Cure was a heavy set, large man, but probably it was as much the muddy condition of the field that slowed the plane. It failed to leave the ground as it had been doing so well earlier. Harriman suddenly saw the girls on the fence in front of him. The Curtiss plane had no brakes; people were crowded up too close to both his right and left. He could neither stop nor change direction! In a desperate effort he pulled back hard on the stick. The plane left the ground, but neither the plane's power, nor available distance permitted sufficient elevation. The plane would hit the telephone lines! He tried to fly under the wires. One wing hit a pole. The plane crashed to the fence below.

Leota Amlund, eight year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. G. H. Amlund of Story City, was killed instantly. Clarice Mathre, age seven, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. L. J. Mathre, also of Story City, was seriously injured. The families had parked their car a distance up the

road; the excited girls had apparently run ahead of their parents to see the plane.

The Des Moines Register of August 4th, in reporting the tragedy, said that the girls, who were double cousins, were the first victims in Iowa of the "pleasure airplane". The scene that Sunday had been transformed from one of excitement - to one of disaster and sadness.

Neither Cure nor Harriman was injured. Both were helped from the wreckage. The little girls were rushed to Mary Greeley, where it was determined that the Amlund girl had died instantly. The Mathre girl was terribly injured but reports that evening were that the doctors were saying that she had a chance of surviving. The Ames Tribune of Monday, August 4, stated that doctors had worked through the night to overcome the shock and loss of blood that she had experienced.

Harriman, when he first pulled himself from the wrecked plane, was frantic and at wits end. Seaman Knapp, Ames business man and longtime friend of the Harriman family, took Harriman by the arm and walked him down the road. Harriman would never fly a plane again. He was taken to his home and reports were that he was in a state of nervous collapse. The next day, however, the Tribune stated that he had regained his composure, and had gone to the hospital to personally check on the Mathre girl.

Clarice Mathre today is Mrs. Severin Flattebo of Story City. After a long convalescence at the home of her parents she was able to return to school after being out for a full year. She lives comfortably with her husband, who for years worked on the Iowa State campus and is now retired. The Flattebo's son, Sanford Flattebo, is engaged in the trucking business in Story City. Mrs. Flattebo has done well in living out pleasant memories to balance that sad day in 1919.

Walter Harriman returned to Iowa State College, graduating in 1921. He was the son of Dr. W. E. Harri-

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# Authentic Clock For Old School

by Ellen Landon

Thanks to the local Captain Greeley Quester group, Hoggatt School, Ames' first schoolhouse, refurbished and relocated to the Meeker School grounds several years ago, now has an authentic Waterbury School clock.

Jan Walter presented it to the Ames Heritage Association at the annual meeting at the Ames Public Library on March 5. The Heritage Association coordinated the rehabilitation of Hoggatt and is responsible for its maintenance.

This oak, octagonal clock with drop pendulum runs for eight days per winding. It was manufactured in the 1870s at Waterbury, Connecticut and ended up at Hoggatt School via a southern Indiana farmer, a Des Moines clock collector and repairman, a West Des Moines clock dealer, and Jackie Smith, a Captain Greeley Quester with a talent for browsing.

"We learned from the Heritage Association that a clock was near the top of the list of items they wanted for the school so we were on the lookout for one," Jackie explained.

One day she and several other Questers were antiquing in West Des Moines when she left the group to stop at the Howe Clock Works, Ltd. She explained to the proprietor what she wanted. He promptly called a Robert Pomeroy, a longtime Firestone worker who had turned to clock collecting and repair fulltime after he lost his job.

"Mr Pomeroy told us that he had two clocks, the Waterbury and a Seth Thomas. We liked the Waterbury because it was oak, and that seemed to go better with the interior," Jackie continued.

Mr. Pomeroy had acquired the clock in southern Indiana from a farmer by the name of Ralph Saver who had stored it in his barn after using it in his home for many years.

It was in terrible shape. However, Mr. Pomeroy brought it home and cleaned it up, put it in working order, and brought it to its original state. Papers on the back indicated it had been cleaned in 1912.

Now, for the first time, the Waterbury School House Clock is in a real school!

Fortunately, the Captain Greeley Questers had some extra money to pay for the gift. They had applied for and received a preservation and restoration grant from the Iowa State Questers for \$300.

In a way, these members seem to have "adopted" the Hoggatt School. They have given two kerosene reflector wall lamps located by a member on a trip to West Branch. A book strap and a wooden pointer stick were found on an excursion to Conrad and were brought back for Hoggatt.

"Now we think we have spotted a brass school bell," Jackie said. "We'll be talking about that at our next meeting. And after that ... well, it's the group's understanding that there is a need for a new stove to replace the present model.

"In a way," she continued, "the Ames Heritage Association and the Questers are a lot alike. We both like

to learn about and preserve the older way of life."

Captain Greeley is one of seven Ames chapters. Others are the Cynthia Duff, Oakes Ames, Margaret Stanton, Frederica Shattuck, Dane 207, and the Neta Snook.

Questers have a saying: "It's fun to seek and a joy to find!" The Greeley and other chapters are turning that thought into reality as they look for and provide authentic accessories to provide local people with an accurate picture of the way school was a hundred and more years ago.

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## Tragedy-continued from page 3

man who served as college physician at Iowa State from 1895 to 1907. Dr. Harriman then had practiced medicine in Ames till his death in 1909. Walter's mother, Mrs. Mary Harriman, will be remembered for her many years of teaching in the Ames Schools. Walter Harriman received his medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania and practiced surgery in Philadelphia from 1926 to 1930. From 1931 till his death on October 11, 1943, he practiced surgery at Sioux City, Iowa.

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